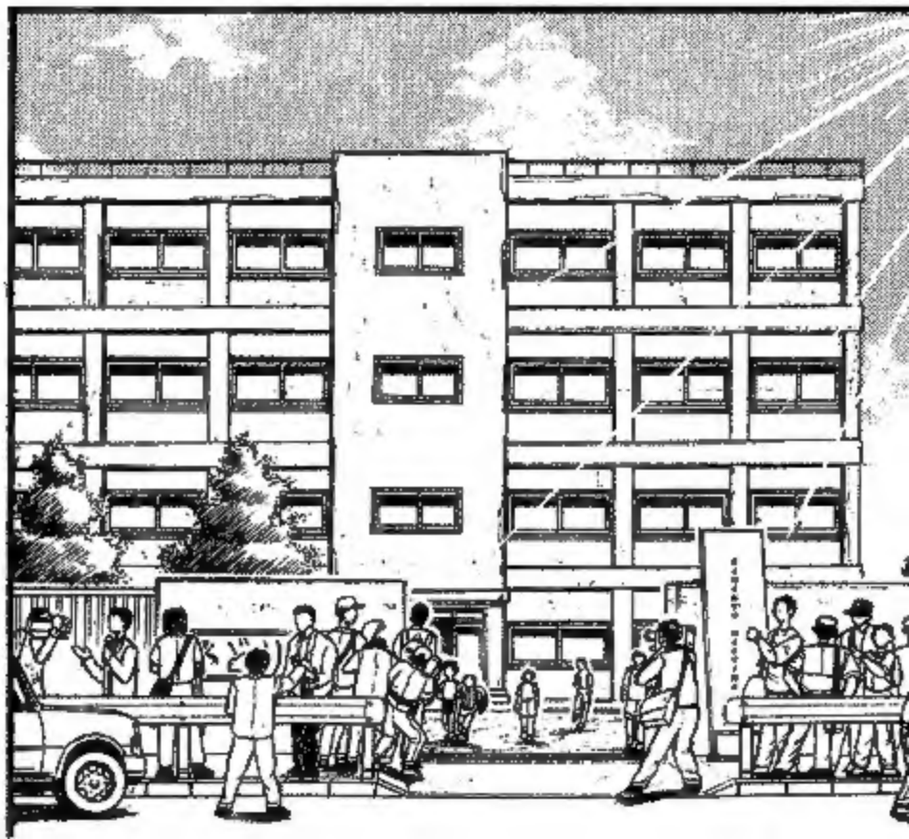
I KNOW WE CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT MONEY...
BUT TO GET IT, SOME PEOPLE ARE READY TO KILL!
NOW, MONEY SCARES ME.
ACT II : CIRCUS * DEPARTURE
CHAPTER NINE "LETTER FROM A FRIEND"
I OFTEN USED TO WISH I COULD AT LEAST BUY HER A FLOWER.
MY MOTHER USED TO HAVE A PART-TIME JOB WHEN I WAS LIVING WITH HER IN OUR LITTLE ONE-ROOMED FLAT. IT WASN'T EASY EVERYDAY.
SUDDENLY, DOZENS OF PEOPLE, WHO WERE JUST TRYING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF MY SITUATION, STARTED TO SHOW UP.
... EVERYTHING CHANGED.
LATER, MY FATHER LEFT ME A 18 BILLION YEN HERITAGE. FROM THAT MOMENT ...
I TOLD SHIROGANE THAT MONEY SCARED ME ...
WAS TO BE ABLE TO OFFER A FLOWER TO MY MOTHER.
ALL I WANTED ...
BUT...
AND, I LOST SOMEONE VERY IMPORTANT TO ME.

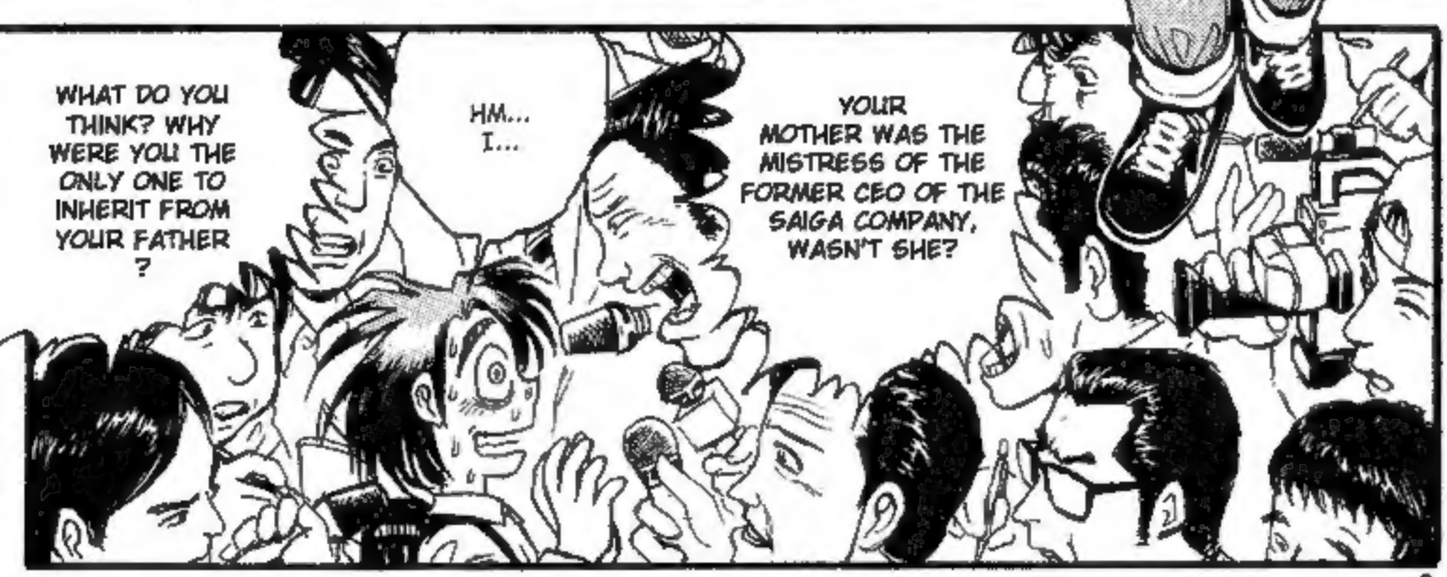
A VERY SKILLFUL PUPPET MASTER IS NOTHING MORE THAN A PUPPET MASTER WHO MANAGED TO MANIPULATE HIS PUPPET WHILE CONSTANTLY REMAINING AWARE OF THE DANGER IT CAN BRING ...
TO ALL THOSE WHO SURROUND HIM.
SHE ANSWERED ME VERY SOFTLY ...

ACT II : CIRCUS * DEPARTURE
CHAPTER NINE: "LETTER FROM A FRIEND"

2



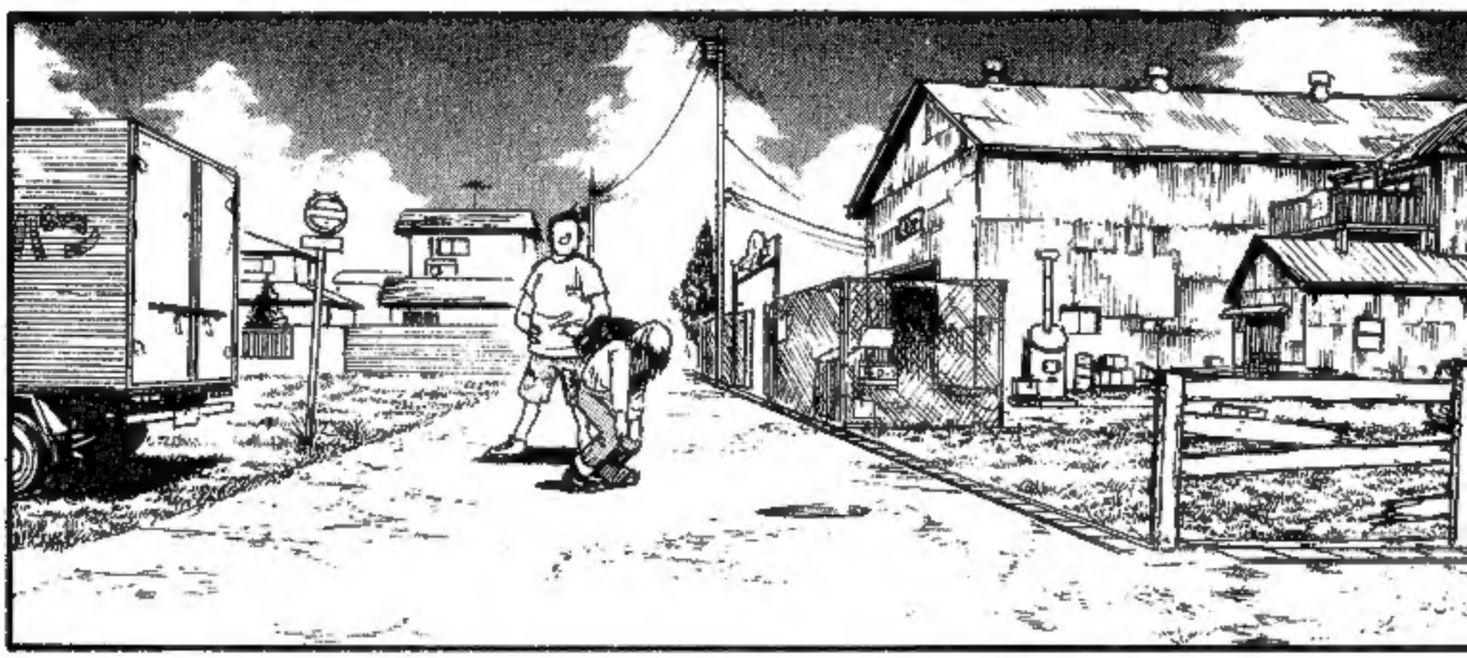
O.UA
AAHHH
DO YOU KNOW THAT THE SCHOOL IS SETTING UP A MEETING TO EXPLAIN TO ALL THE PARENTS WHY YOU WERE KIDNAPPED AND HOW YOUR FRIENDS GOT INVOLVED IN THAT CASE ?!
ARE YOU MASARU SAIGA?!
WHAT DO YOU THINK ?
TAN TAN TAN


WHAT DO YOU THINK? WHY WERE YOU THE ONLY ONE TO INHERIT FROM YOUR FATHER ?
HM... I...
YOUR MOTHER WAS THE MISTRESS OF THE FORMER CEO OF THE SAIGA COMPANY, WASN'T SHE?

SPAA
COME ON, SAY SOME-THING !
BUT... HM...

DAN DAN DAN
WAIT !!

ATSUSHI?! BUT...
GO

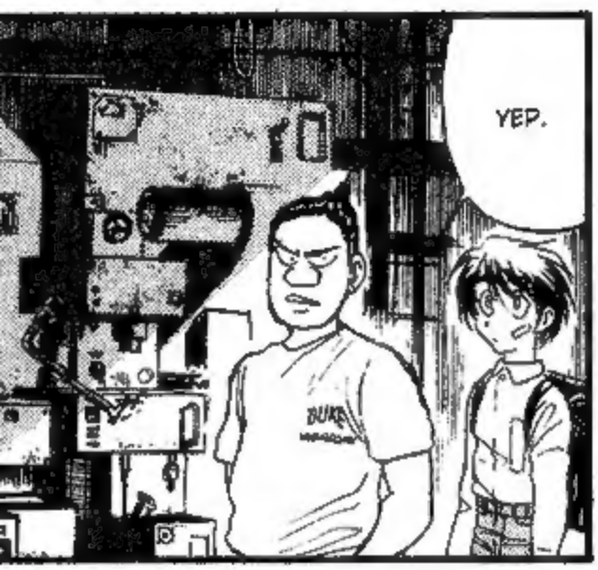


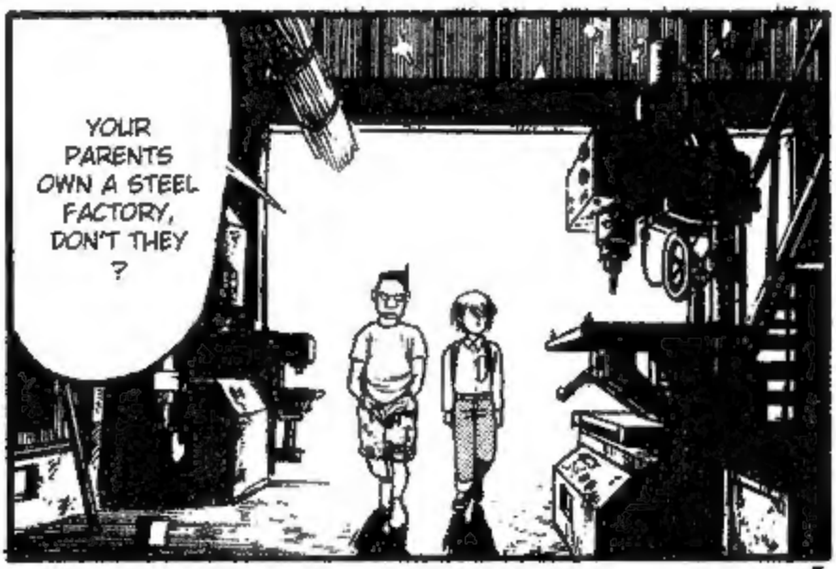
HA... REALLY? YOU THINK SO?
YOU'RE TOO KIND!
IDIOT! YOU MUSTN'T TALK TO THOSE PEOPLE!

THANK YOU ... YOU SAVED ME ... ALL THESE JOURNALISTS JUMPED ON ME, AND I COULDN'T DO ANYTHING!

Kajiyama steel
TO MY HOUSE !

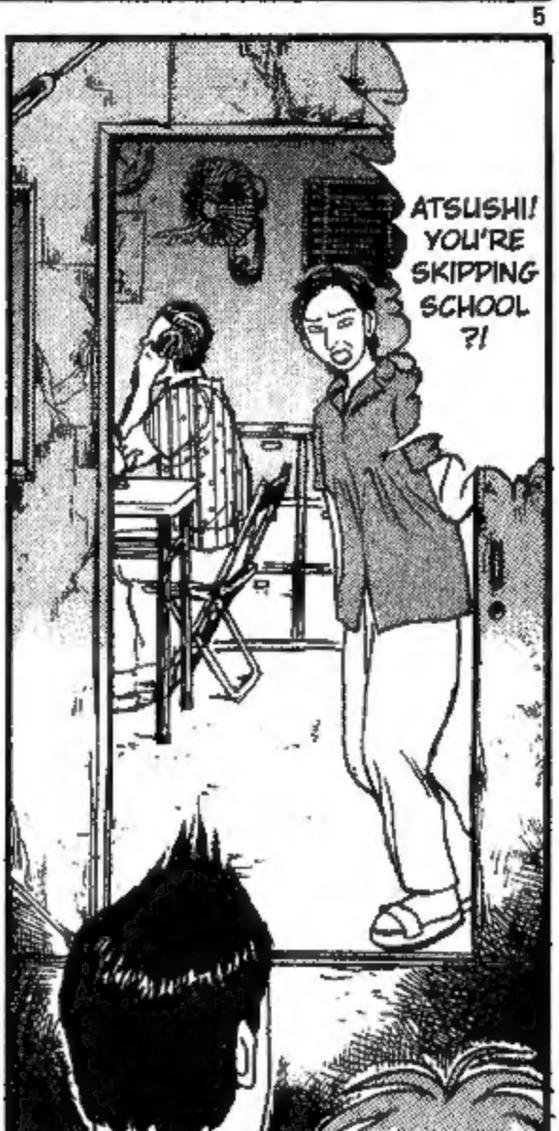
WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?
COME WITH ME!


YEP.


YOUR PARENTS OWN A STEEL FACTORY, DON'T THEY ?

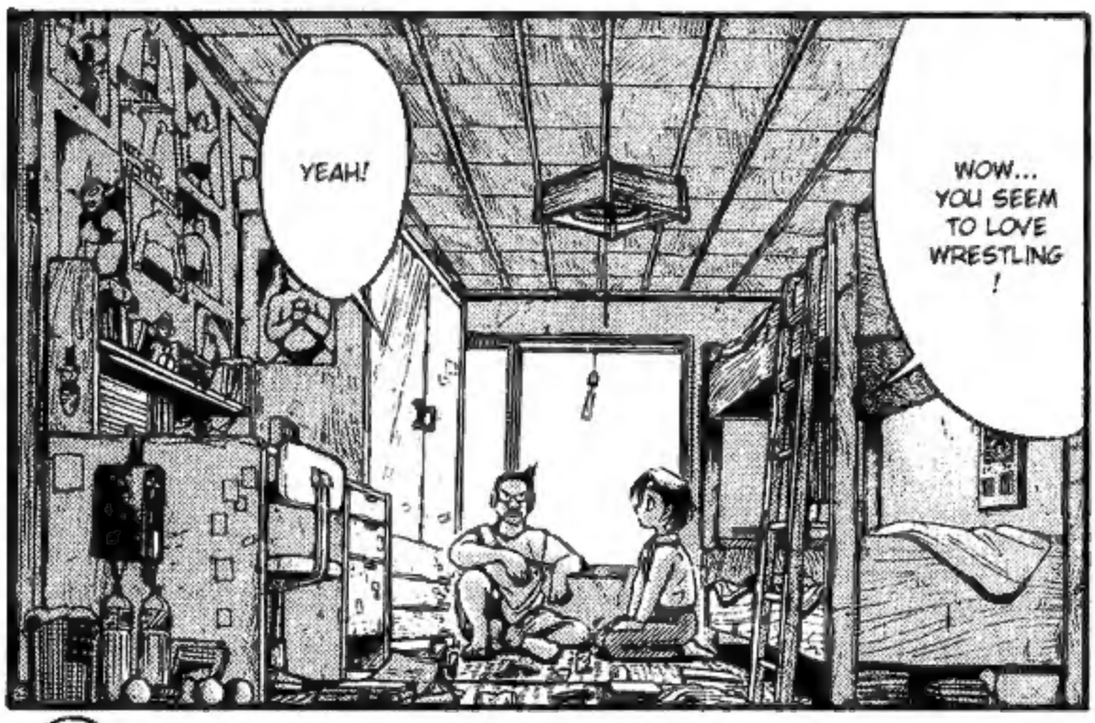
5

GOOD MORNING.
NO. WE'RE GOING.


ATSUSHI! YOU'RE SKIPPING SCHOOL ?!

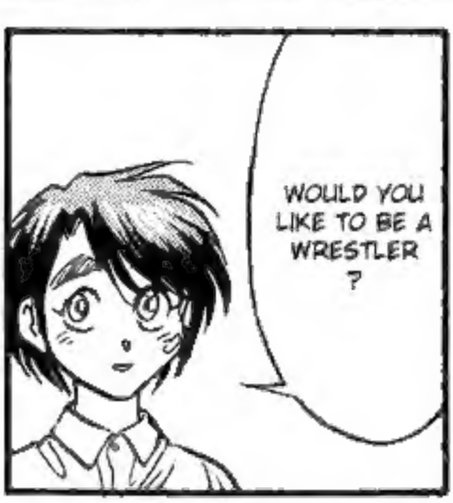
...

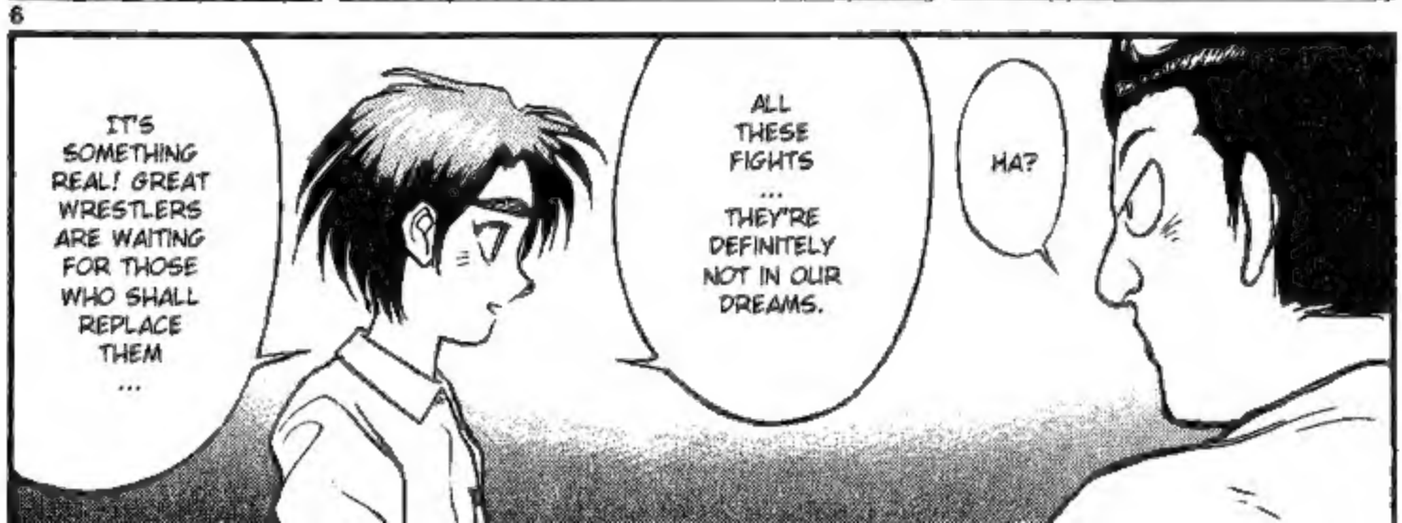
HEY, TAKE THE PHONE!


YEAH!
WOW... YOU SEEM TO LOVE WRESTLING !

NO, YOU'RE WRONG.

MASARU, THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE !
THESE THINGS ONLY EXIST ON TELEVISION!


WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE A WRESTLER ?


IT'S SOMETHING REAL! GREAT WRESTLERS ARE WAITING FOR THOSE WHO SHALL REPLACE THEM ...
ALL THESE FIGHTS ... THEY'RE DEFINITELY NOT IN OUR DREAMS.
HA?

TODAY, NARUMI ISN'T HERE ANYMORE ...
...
HAA! THAT'S WHY YOU REALLY SUCK AT FIGHTING!
I THOUGHT THOSE THINGS WERE ONLY MADE IN MOVIES ...
NARUMI WAS A FRIEND OF MINE. HE SAVED MY LIFE. BUT, BEFORE THAT, HE EXPLAINED SOMETHING TO ME...
AND YOU'LL ALWAYS BE ABLE TO FIND SOMEONE WHO'LL TEACH YOU THE ART OF FIGHTING ... THIS IS NOTHING VIRTUAL! THIS IS REALITY!
LISTEN, MASARU... MARTIAL ARTS AND HAND-FIGHTING... ALL THIS IS FOR REAL!
GRRAH
YOU LITTLE MORON! DO YOU THINK IT'LL SCARE ME?! IF I WANNA HEAR YOU STORY, IT'S BECAUSE I'M INTERESTED IN IT!
I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU, BUT IT'S NOT A REALLY FUNNY STORY, SO ...
HMM... IT'S...
TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED.
YOU'VE EXPERIENCED STRANGE THINGS ...
MASARU!
WOW ...
GLING

HAAA... MASARU'LL NEVER COME OUT ...
MA-SA-RU ?
OOH
I SHOWED YOU THAT I COULD BE A COWARD, AND THAT I WASN'T THAT TOUGH !
ANYWAY ...

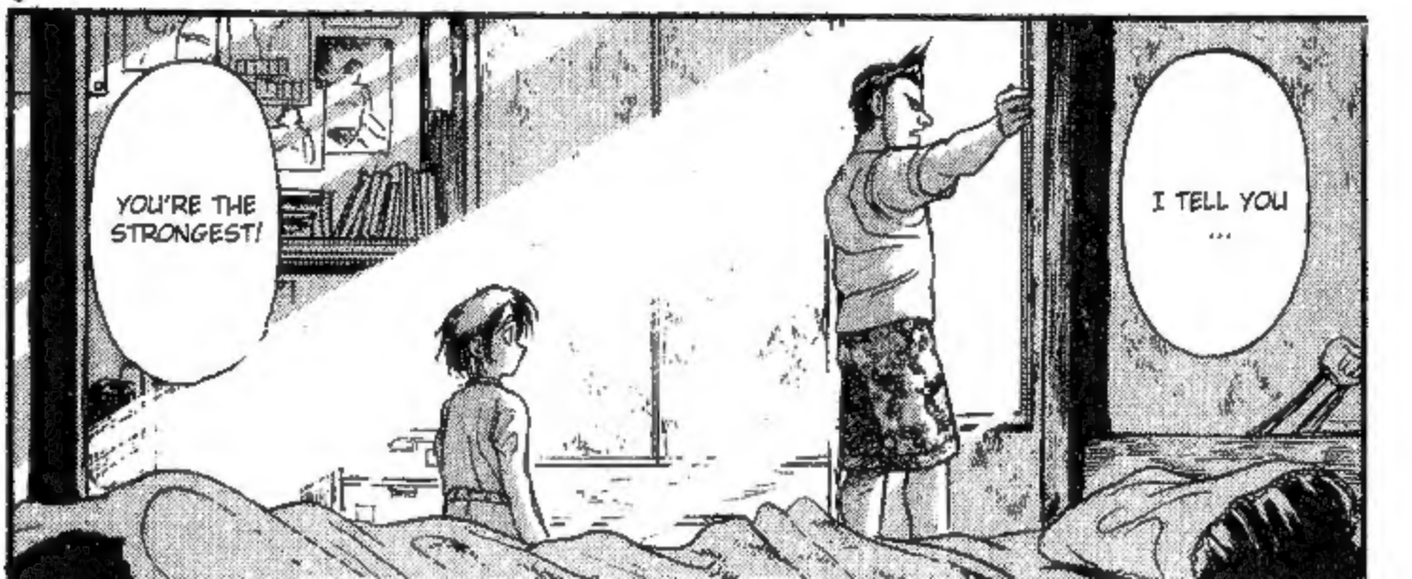
LET IT GO! IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT!
AGAIN, I'M REALLY SORRY, ATSUSHI.
THEN CAME OUR KIDNAPPING.

CLAC
... EVEN WHEN WE GOT KIDNAPPED !
BUT YOU STOOD STILL AND FIRM! BRAVE AND CONFIDENT UNTIL THE END!

YOU KNOW ... ANYONE WOULD HAVE REACTED THE WAY YOU DID.

LISTEN, ATSUSHI ...
...

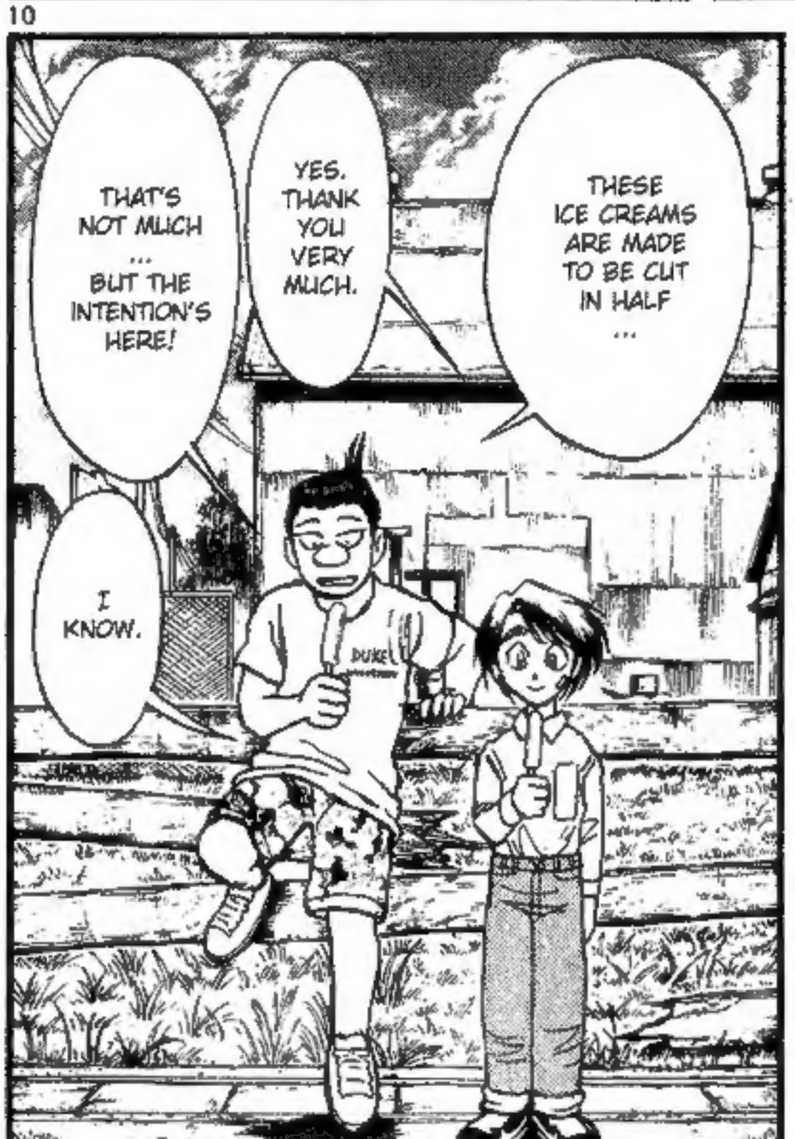
ON THE TRUCK, YOU DID EVERY-THING TO PROTECT US!
YOU WON'T ...

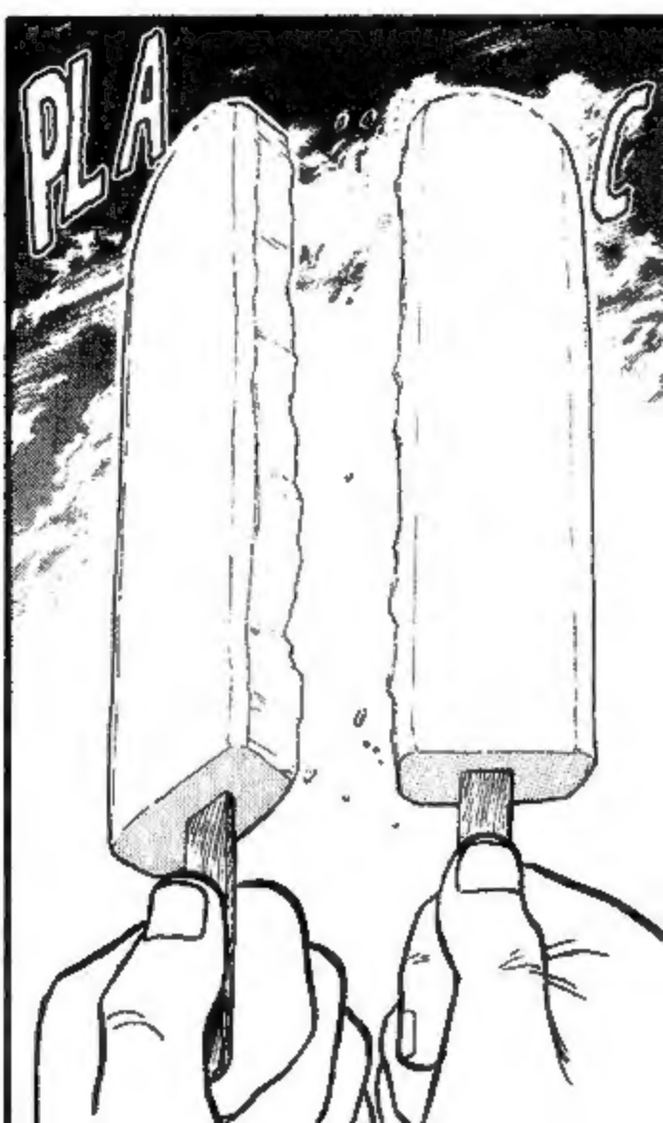

YOU'RE THE STRONGEST!
I TELL YOU ...

OK! LET'S TALK ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE! I DON'T THINK I CAN OFFER YOU ANYTHING. ACTUALLY, WE NEVER HAVE ANYTHING AT HOME!
NOT EVEN SYRUPS!

YOU'RE MY GUEST, AND I MUST OFFER YOU SOMETHING!
SHUT UP, MASARU!
DON'T BOTHER, ATSUSHI! IT'S OK!
DON
VROOM
BUT, I THINK I LEFT SOME COINS AROUND HERE ...

ATSUSHI! YOU KNOW, I CAN...
GOT IT!!
MASTER, ALWAYS KEEP SOME MONEY WITH YOU. YOU MIGHT NEED IT SOMEDAY ...
ZAWA
ZON
A WHILE AGO, I HAD PUT 100 YEN BEHIND THE CUPBOARD!
9
BATAN
DAN
GEEZ! THEY'RE NOT HERE!


THAT'S NOT MUCH ... BUT THE INTENTION'S HERE!
YES. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
THESE ICE CREAMS ARE MADE TO BE CUT IN HALF ...
I KNOW.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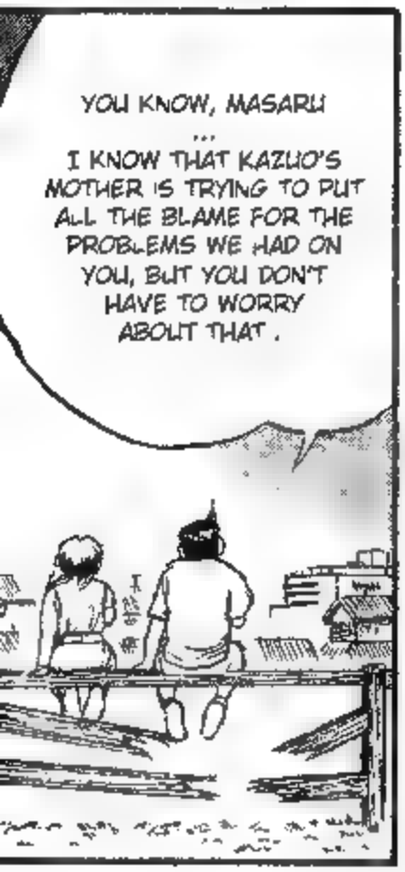

YOU KNOW, MASARU
...
I KNOW THAT KAZUO'S MOTHER IS TRYING TO PUT ALL THE BLAME FOR THE PROBLEMS WE HAD ON YOU, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THAT.

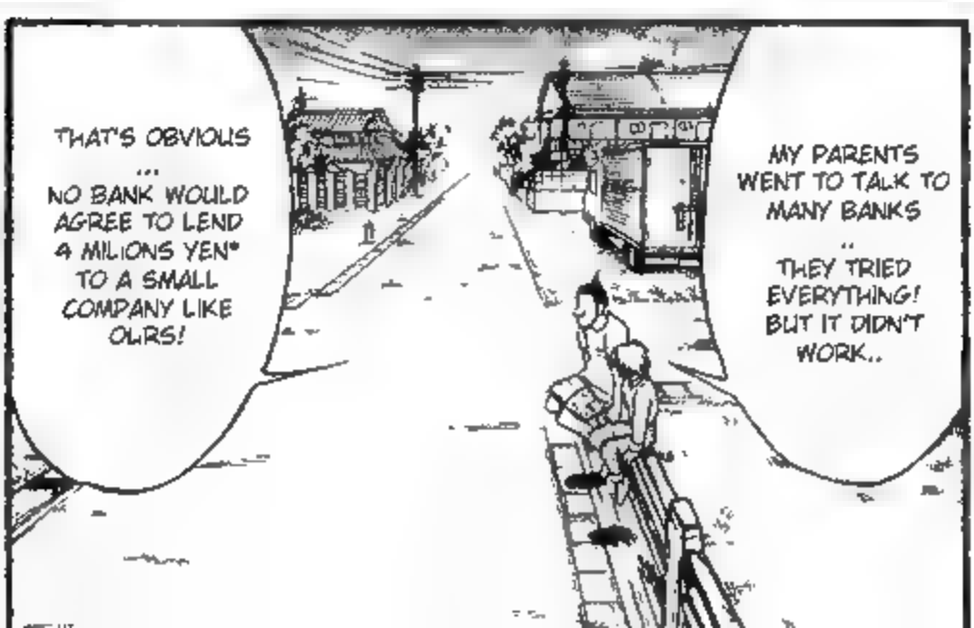
YEP.
THEY ARE VERY COOL!

CROC

HA!
YOUR PARENTS MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE WORRIED ABOUT YOU, TOO.
I SINCERELY BELIEVE THAT MISS TAKEUCHI WAS VERY WORRIED ..
IT'S MY FAULT.
HOWEVER, THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED

HERE, WE MAKE NUTS, SCREWS, LITTLE STEEL PIECES.
A SHORT TIME AGO, OUR BIGGEST CUSTOMER WENT BANKRUPT. 90% OF OUR SALES TURNOVER!
WHY ?

*AROUND 30 000 EUROS


THAT'S OBVIOUS ...
NO BANK WOULD AGREE TO LEND 4 MILIONS YEN* TO A SMALL COMPANY LIKE OURS!
MY PARENTS WENT TO TALK TO MANY BANKS ..
THEY TRIED EVERYTHING! BUT IT DIDN'T WORK..

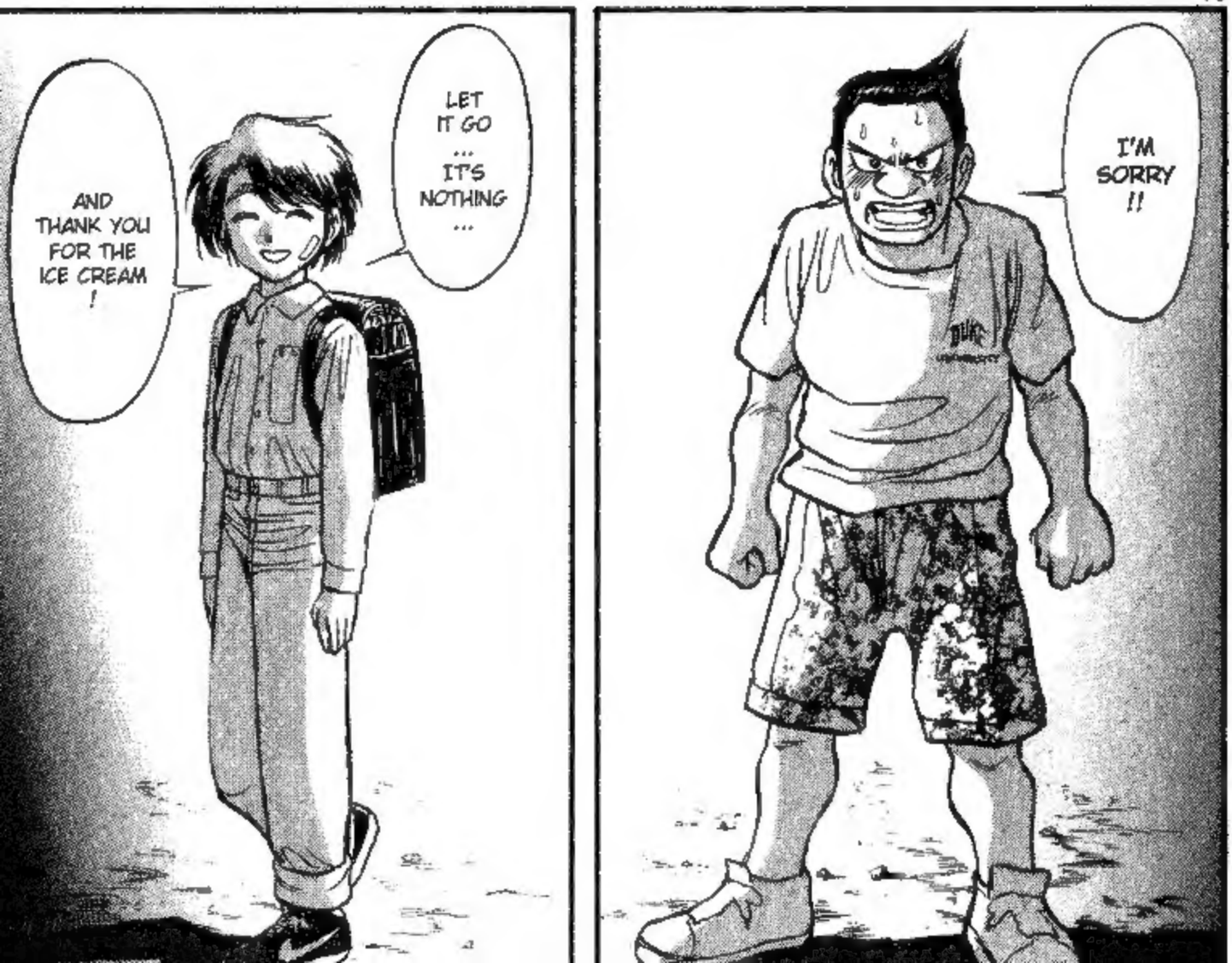
I CAN'T STAND SEEING MY PARENTS ARGUING EVERYDAY FOR NOTHING ANYMORE!
BUT...
ANYWAY! I'M STILL JUST A KID ... THIS IS NONE OF MY BUSINESS !
AND THEN WE WOULD EAT GOOD CURRY IN A RESTAURANT! THAT WAS AWESOME !
WE USED TO GO TO THE ZOO TOGETHER!
WE USED TO BE VERY CLOSE ...
WHEN OUR FACTORY WAS WORKING WELL ...

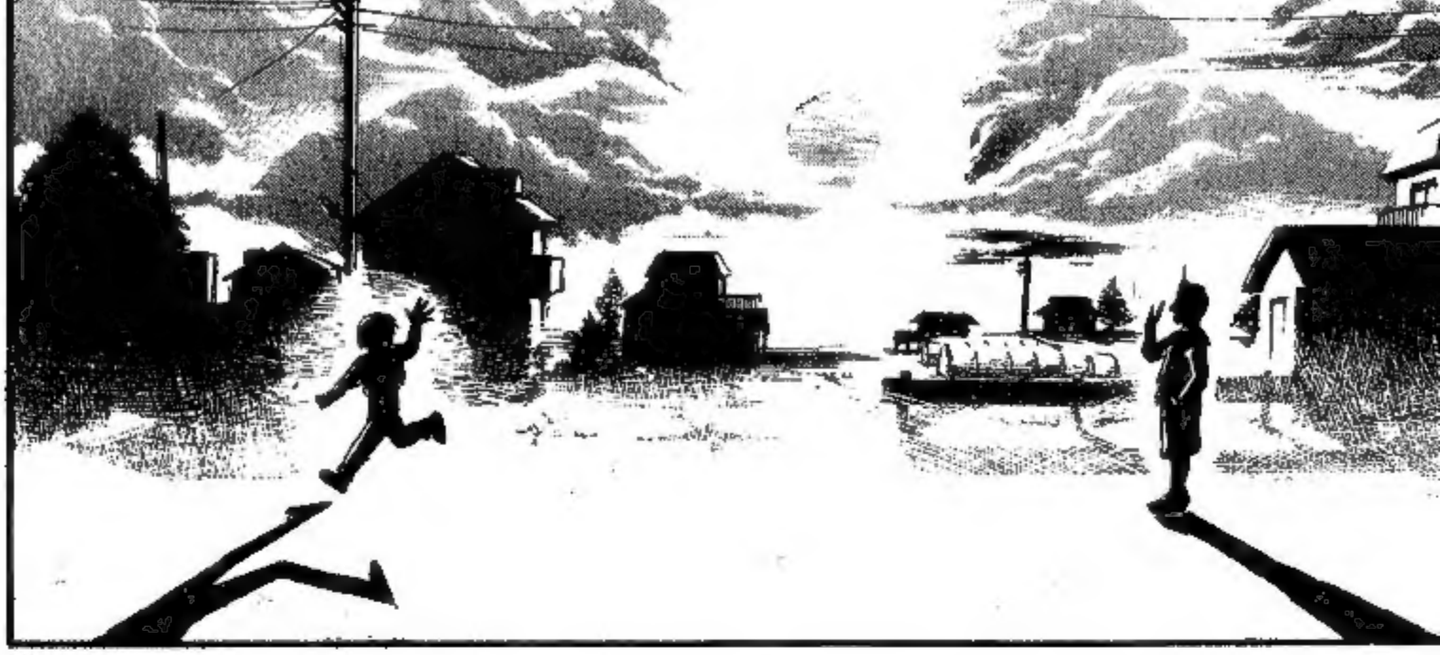
THAT WRESTLING WASN'T JUST A DREAM! THAT IT'S REAL!
I LIKED WHAT YOU SAID EARLIER ...
I'VE DECIDED TO BECOME A WRESTLER !
IF WE HAD MONEY ... WOULD EVERYTHING GO BACK TO HOW IT USED TO BE?
BUT, NOW ... WE DON'T HAVE ANY MORE MONEY! AND WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE MONEY IN THIS WORLD, YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING!

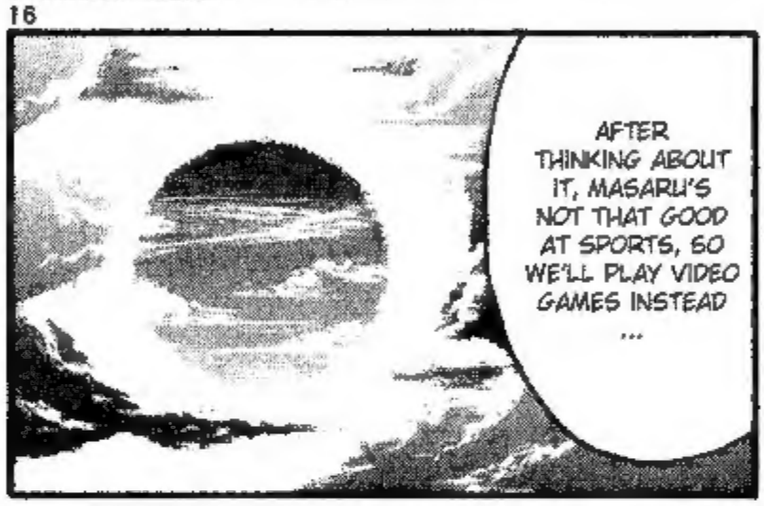
I KNOW YOU'LL MAKE IT.
I'LL MAKE A LOT OF MONEY! AND THEN ..
YES!
...
YOU REALLY THINK SO?

I'M SORRY, BUT .. I HAVE TO GO. SHIROGANE WILL END UP WORRYING ..
POF!
YEAH!
YOU SMILED THE SAME WAY WHEN YOU CARRIED ME ON THE TRUCK!
...
HEHE!
NO DOUBT ... YOU'RE THE STRONGEST OF US!

GRATTE
GRATTE
I... HMM ...
MASARU!


LET IT GO ... IT'S NOTHING ...
AND THANK YOU FOR THE ICE CREAM !
I'M SORRY !!




AFTER THINKING ABOUT IT, MASARU'S NOT THAT GOOD AT SPORTS, SO WE'LL PLAY VIDEO GAMES INSTEAD ...

TOMORROW, WE'LL PLAY SOCCER TOGETHER ... I PROMISE!

... DUE TO FAMILY MATTERS, MASARU SAIGA HAD TO MOVE AND LEAVE OUR SCHOOL.
I'M HERE TO INFORM YOU THAT ...

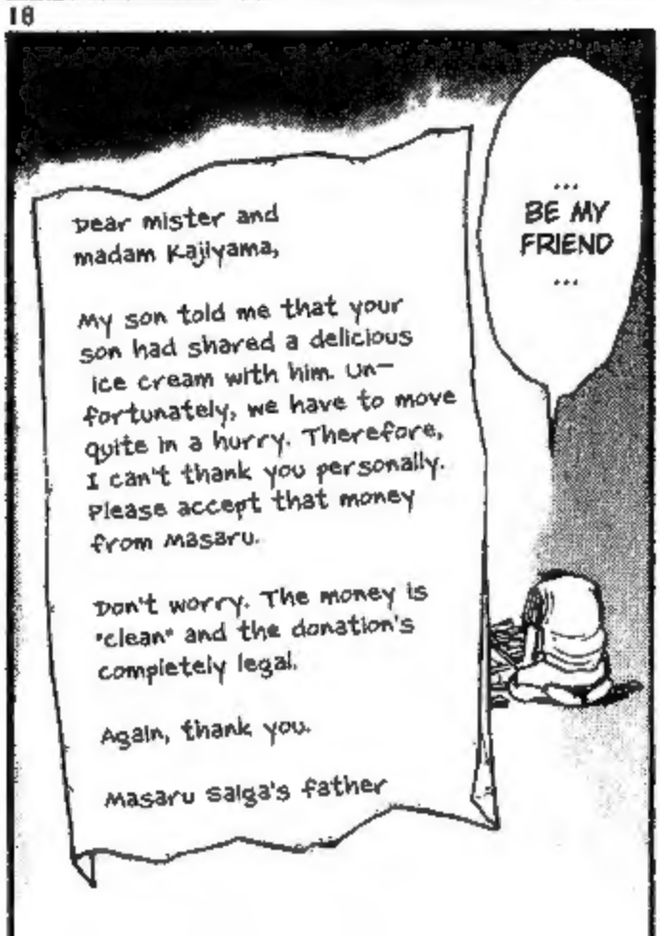
HE WANTED TO SAY THAT HE WAS SAD FOR LEAVING THE CLASS WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO TALK TO YOU ...
EVEN MORE, NOW THAT HE HAD MANAGED TO MAKE SOME FRIENDS.
AND HE SPECIALLY WANTED TO SAY TWO THINGS :
"AGAIN, THANK YOU VERY MUCH"
AND "TAKE CARE" ...

THANK YOU FOR ACCEPTING MY LITTLE "MISSION", SHIROGANE ...
THAT WAS THE LEAST I COULD DO. BUT ... ARE YOU SURE YOU DID THE RIGHT THING ?
MAYBE I SHOULDN'T HAVE DONE IT ...
BUT...
I REALLY WANTED TO HELP HIM.

... YOU'RE AN IDIOT !!
MA-SA-RU !

I DIDN'T OFFER YOU ICE CREAM FOR YOU TO DO THAT !!

WHO TOLD YOU TO DO THAT?! HEY!
I CAN'T ACCEPT THAT!


Dear mister and madam Kajiyama,
My son told me that your son had shared a delicious ice cream with him. Unfortunately, we have to move quite in a hurry. Therefore, I can't thank you personally. Please accept that money from Masaru.
Don't worry. The money is "clean" and the donation's completely legal.
Again, thank you.
Masaru Saiga's father
... BE MY FRIEND ...

I JUST WANTED YOU TO ...